

ANCIENT RECORDS

by Floyd Thomas Pratt F.H.C., M.A.G.I.

WHY?...

Many of us in the family history research genre, have run across erroneous dates, places and people in our search for ancestral data. Sometimes, we accept this data without knowing the origin of such records and most of us accept the creditability of these dates, names and places without knowing the reasons why we pursue or have even taken an interest in this subject.

In an attempt at offering an explanation for our insatiable pursuit of ancestral data, I feel it is important to know the reasons, purpose and history behind our desire, which has evolved for some, even to the point of an obsession, concerning our thirst to know more about our ancestors than a normal and reasonable individual should.

The following discourse is offered, as I draw upon 40 years of education, knowledge and experience from membership in the most correct and sophisticated organization established on this earth. It is through this tenure and enlightenment I wish to share some of what I have learned concerning this subject.

RECORDS...

Many of the dates, places and people found in older records have been obtained from church sources, deed documents, wills, daily court transactions and biblical records. As one researches the records available in the courthouses in towns our ancestors lived, information concerning their habits, occupations, business transactions, property acquisitions, children's births and religious affiliations emerge painting a picture of the daily life of our ancestors.

It is inconceivable how the information from these records appears in some patron's family trees posted in various locations such as www.ancestry.com and Family Search. Sometimes upwards of 20 to 30 different trees carry the same records. I ask myself...what drives these individuals to post information in their trees concerning people they didn't and don't even know? I include myself in that same category.

Having somewhat over the last 38 years, a familiarity with the purposes, records and research methods of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, I can enlighten my readers as to how and why these records were obtained, organized and recorded.

IN THE BEGINNING...

Long before man walked this earth, the Lord created and established what is now known to a select few, as the "Plan of Salvation". This plan was created by our loving Heavenly Father, for the benefit of all mankind in an attempt to allow the fallen man since the Garden of Eden to return to live in the spirit world with his creator.

For a greater understanding of this plan and the role the Savior had especially concerning the Atonement, please consult the missionaries of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. However, for our purposes concerning family history, we will concentrate on one aspect of this plan...redemption of our kindred dead.

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One important aspect of the Plan of Salvation is the commandment...**every** individual born in the flesh either male or female since Adam and Eve, including all their posterity, hear the Plan of Salvation in its entirety without encumbrances and based on their understanding of the Plan of Salvation, they must accept or reject the precepts, conditions, requirements and ordinances performed in the Lord's Holy Temples on their behalf.

TIME FOR SCHOOL...

How can this be accomplished, if our ancestors are dead? Great question...when we cross the veil at death, male and female spirits are not allowed to commingle...unless they have received their temple ordinances while in the flesh or by proxy in the spirit world. Male spirits have a place prepared for them and female spirits have a place prepared for them.

In those separate places, if you did not have the opportunity to hear the Plan of Salvation while in the flesh, you get to go to school. They are taught this Plan and those of us on this earth still alive, are not allowed to offer or perform those sacred ordinances on their behalf until 1 year of earth time has elapsed.

The Catholics call this waiting period...purgatory. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Purgatory>

However, where Catholic doctrine believes these souls can be released from purgatory through prayers, the Lord revealed in these latter days, acceptance and obedience of temple ordinances and commitment to the Plan of Salvation is what is necessary to release these souls, so they may continue on their spiritual progression.

The Savior, always one to teach by example, while the Savior's body lay in the tomb, his spirit went to the spirit world and taught the gospel to all those souls who had died since the time of Noah. See <https://www.lds.org/ensign/2003/07/the-saviors-visit-to-the-spirit-world?lang=eng>

After the time of our death, we are judged and if not endowed with the Lord's Temple ordinances, we are sent to the spirit "prison" or school to be taught the gospel.

Under Latter Day doctrine, after the year has passed, we, the living know for a certainty, the deceased ancestor and/or relative has been prepared and taught the Plan of Salvation and is ready to accept or reject the ordinances we are about to do in one of the Lord's temples, on their behalf.

An individual, usually a descendant, in the flesh, as a living being, completes these ordinances **by proxy** on behalf of their kindred dead. Ancestor acceptance or rejection of the Plan of Salvation is of little importance for the living however, we **hope** they accept the concepts and responsibilities that go along with the Plan of Salvation and we hope they will enjoy the same joy and happiness the rest of us share as participants in the Kingdom of God.

However, as proxies, we are not allowed or given the responsibility to judge, condemn or make decisions as to who receives these ordinances. The emphasis stated by the Lord, is **every person** who has ever lived gets the opportunity to make that decision for himself or herself, based on their knowledge of all the facts concerning this plan.

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DON'T HAVE TIME TO LEARN NOW?...

If you tarry all your days on this earth and have not heard of the Plan of Salvation in this life, you will be given an opportunity to be taught this plan in the spirit world after you leave this earthly flesh behind. Nevertheless, you **will be** taught and you **will** have to make a decision.

Well, one could say, "I'll wait until I die, then I will see if this is true and will be taught the Gospel then and I will accept the holy ordinances performed on my behalf". Sounds good, except for some very important elements...[1] "Who will do your ordinances in the Lord's Holy Temple while you are waiting in the spirit world?" And how long will you be waiting, until this work is performed on your behalf?

[2] Also, look at the lost time, while you lived on the earth, by not being able to enjoy the blessings that accompany membership in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Through that membership, you would have been taught the concepts and basics of the Plan of Salvation, and having received your own temple ordinances allowing you to by-pass the guardian angels in the spirit world. Therefore, escaping spirit prison or purgatory.

[3] While you are stuck in purgatory or as I like to call it heaven's waiting room, with millions and billions of other souls, who cannot progress until this work has been performed, on the earth, for their behalf, in one of the Lord's Holy Temples.

This is why there is such an urgency to identify, discover, prove and validate our ancestors so we may perform their temple ordinances on their behalf and allow them to break the bondage of spirit prison and join their families. This is why we as Latter-Day Saints claim, "Families can be together forever". <https://www.lds.org/pages/families-can-be-together-forever?lang=eng>

It is for these purposes, others even non-members of this church feel the spirit of Elijah and with an inexplicable desire, almost an obsession, pursue our ancestor's history not knowing why we have an insatiable thirst for knowledge concerning their lives. It is because we are blinded by the trappings of this world and cannot see across the veil and witness the excitement going on there concerning these temple ordinances.

They are anxiously waiting for this work to be performed, on their behalf, and if you could see across the veil...just a glimpse of what is taking place, you would be excited and happy for them and you also would dedicate your life to helping your ancestors enjoy the same benefits, privileges and opportunities you enjoy as a member of the Lord's Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

THE LORD KNEW AND HE HAD A PLAN...

Therefore, knowing the consequences of the importance of this commandment, it is of upmost importance, we identify our ancestors, to the extent available records will allow and perform the ordinances on their behalf, and record these records as commanded by the Lord.

This commandment was so important to the welfare of mankind, even prophets of old, like Elijah, who held the keys of authority for this work and Malachi wrote about this work being performed in the last days. Recording these vital records has been a commandment from the Lord commencing with Adam and Eve and for this purpose these records were recorded.

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The ordinances we perform in modern day temples are the same as performed for the living and the dead since the days of Adam and Eve and every temple in each dispensation performed these same ordinances.

When the Lord removed these temples off the face of the earth and postponed these ordinances...due to the wickedness of man, there had to be a restoration of the gospel in order to restore these sacred ordinances.

This restoration is the reason and purpose for the prophet Joseph Smith and the organization of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in 1843.

FAITHFUL OBEDIENCE THROUGH THE AGES...

Most of the oldest surviving records we have are from local churches, *i.e.*, births, baptisms, marriages and deaths.

As mankind expanded and communities were formed within countries, territories, states and cities, civil records were incorporated to include property transactions, court records, probate documents, and all manner of transactions dealing with business, commercial and personal involvement between entities.

Not only was it important for the civil authorities to record these transactions, but even the local churches in obedience to the commandment of the Lord, recorded these activities, not knowing they would be of utmost importance at a future date. This is the reason; some of the oldest known records of mankind, have their foundation in religious activities.

In olden days, the local church was the center for community activity among its residents. Not only providing a location for religious ceremonies but also social as well as a person's reputation and community standing revolved around their church participation.

Regardless of religious affiliation, records were kept, as decreed by the presiding church authorities and community standards were determined by the citizen's obedience to the precepts of the gospel taught within the walls of these churches.

As we researchers, endeavor to seek our ancestor's records, we rely more and more on these ancient church records. Some of my oldest personal records were obtained from the repository of the St. Louis Genealogical Society's Library in St. Louis, dating back as far as the early 1700's as recorded in the local Catholic Churches.

Unfortunately, there were very few records kept, prior to the 1840's, unless your ancestor could claim royal blood. Every nation recorded the ancestral records of their royalty and if you are lucky enough to tie into one of the royal houses, you might find generations of ancestors to add to your tree.

However, the common man could not afford the luxury of scribes to record his family tree and any information about him or his family had to be recorded in a family bible or by the local church.

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Regardless, the Lord always finds a way to help mankind, knowing his faithful servants, who love him, will be obedient in carrying out his commandments. As mentioned, he established a restored church upon the earth, which we now know to be the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

The purpose of this resorted church is to bring forth all the precious aspects of the Plan of Salvation that had been lost to mankind on this earth. You remember...we called those black times the "dark ages".

FIRST A RESTORATION, THEN THE BLESSINGS...

When the Lord established the restored church, each ordinance that had been performed in the ancient temples, had to be reintroduced and taught to the leadership of the restored church. This re-education, was done by men who had once lived on the earth and had died taking with them their "Keys of Authority" of their particular ordinance.

The Prophet Elijah, while he tarried on this Earth, held the keys of Family History work and the corresponding saving temple ordinances, he had to be the one to restore these ordinances to the current church authorities in the 1840's.

A detailed account of his activity can be found

<https://www.lds.org/manual/teachings-joseph-smith/chapter-26?lang=eng>

Having restored these keys for temple ordinances to seal families together, to the Church leadership in the 1840's, family history research began to expand and take interest on the earth with each passing year.

Sections in libraries where created to house records for researching family histories. Genealogical Societies were created due to the increased interest in family history work. Books devoted to family histories began to gain the interest of the pubic.

As more and more people investigated the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and were lucky enough to gain a testimony and commit to the Lord's message, namely the "Plan of Salvation", membership in these churches began to grow creating a desire and need for additional temples to accommodate the demand of temple ordinances necessary for our kindred dead.

The desire to have your ancestor's receive the same blessings we, the living enjoy in the Temple, became a driving force across the earth. The Lord inspired non-members to seek after their ancestors, knowing the work they will do in seeking their ancestors, will benefit their ancestors one day, even if they chose not to join the church. He knew others within the Church would perform the Temple ordinances for **non-member** ancestors. Remember his mandate...everybody gets a chance?

SEND FORTH THE EMISSARIES...

The Savior, knowing the importance of these records to the Plan of Salvation, brought forth technology to assist in organizing, recording and preserving these records. He commanded the leadership of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, to send emissaries with cameras to various points on the Earth, to record for posterity all the vital records that could be obtained for the purpose of advancing this sacred work.

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Thousands of men with cameras, went to all points of the earth...where they were allowed, recording, deeds, marriages, deaths, births and all manner of civil records available long before, the present state of paranoia concerning security was an issue. These recordings were processed on microfilm and rented for a few dollars to various Family History Centers throughout the world to assist those in seeking their ancestor's information.

As these microfilms grew into millions, new additions were added on a daily basis. Housed in a granite mountain in Utah for protection, we could rent for a couple of weeks, vital records from all over the world without leaving our hometown.

INDEXING...ANOTHER BLESSING...

As the Lord increased our technology for this work, a few years ago, the church began a program to transcribe these records from microfilm into the digital network. This program is called "Indexing". Volunteers from all over the world can assist in this endeavor creating even easier public access to this vital information. <https://familysearch.org/indexing/>

The church is seeking volunteers to help convert these microfilm records into digital form and many of you have visited their website Family Search <https://familysearch.org/> and have taken advantage of those free online records.

HOLD ON A MINUTE WHAT ABOUT...

Many of you are probably asking, what about all those people who lived and died without ever seeing a preacher? Or being recorded in a book or how about those people who died and their records are lost? And what about the people, who lived and died, like whole races of people and there are no written records left for them?

These are all good questions, and how do I know? Because these are the exact questions I asked when I became aware of the work. And I shall tell you what the Lord has told our leadership...at every birth there are two witnesses, first the birth mother and second; the guardian angel.

It is one of the duties of the guardian angel to record in the heavenly records all births, marriages, deaths and daily events in that person's life. These records are recorded in the heavenly archives and are infallible.

During the coming Millennium era, which is the 1000 years the Savior reigns in leadership on this earth, these heavenly archives will be opened up to the Church leadership on this earth.

At the same time of the first resurrection and all those millions of people who did not get their Temple ordinances accomplished during their lifetime or performed by proxy at a latter date, will get the opportunity to have this work completed during the Millennium. Remember, after they died, they were taught the Plan of Salvation?

It has been prophesied, there will be Temples on every block, around the world working 24/7 during the Millennium time.

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Those persons, who were lucky enough to have accepted the Plan of Salvation while in the flesh and those who have accepted the Plan of Salvation after someone performed their temple ordinances on their behalf, will be assisting those who will need our help. There will be billions of spirits needing help with their ordinances.

My question to you would be...which group will you be in?

GRATITUDE TO THE OBEDIENT...

Nothing I have shared with you is a secret, but commonly known within the community of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Remember, the Lord desires **ALL** receive the blessings of the temple and as obedient servants we are bound by covenant to share and comply.

When we researchers see old dates, names and places concerning our ancestors, these records probably came from some church leadership in our ancestor's local communities.

Sometimes we are lucky enough to have someone's bible records passed down to us but most of these records came from obedient religious servants, whether bishops, priests, rabbis, preachers and reverends regardless of denominational preferences.

Without their faithfulness to the promptings of the spirit, we would not be privileged to the records we now have and we owe them a measure of gratitude due to their obedience. Thank you for setting the example my fellow brethren.

So, my fellow researchers, as you continue your quest for ancestral knowledge, remember, this is not a whim or a curiosity concerning your ancestors, but a divine, ordained plan to benefit all of mankind designed with a single minded purpose...to help the faithful return to live with our Heavenly Father.

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